

**THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
AND  
THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS:  
A LEGACY REVEALED**

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## **Abstract**

Between 1934 and 1942 the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) played a vital role within the Bureau of Reclamation. From one initial CCC camp assigned to Reclamation in 1934, the program expanded to a peak of 46 camps at the height of the CCC program during the summer of 1935. From then on the number of Reclamation camps operating fluctuated between 34 and 44 up until May 1941. Thereafter camps were closed in response to the national defense needs. By June 30, 1942, only seven camps remained on Reclamation projects and they were discontinued shortly thereafter.

The contributions of the CCC to Reclamation are not well known. Though the number of CCC camps operating on Reclamation projects was small in comparison to other agencies, the program had a significant impact and assisted in furthering the goals of Reclamation during the devastating years of the Great Depression. At a time when financially stricken farmers were unable to adequately maintain older Reclamation irrigation facilities, CCC enrollees were instrumental in rehabilitating them. The enrollees also provided the necessary labor to develop supplemental water supplies and construct new irrigation projects. Lastly, CCC assistance afforded Reclamation the opportunity to expand on its primary mission of irrigation to develop recreational amenities at a number of its reservoirs.

This paper explores the contributions and role of the CCC within Reclamation and within the larger context of the national CCC program. Origins of Reclamation's camps, the project work accomplished, the public perception of the camps, the impact on enrollees, and the success of the program are addressed.

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

As dry winds and dust storms blew across the western High Plains in the early 1930s leaving devastated farmers in their wake, newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt was formulating sweeping plans in the nation's capital for emergency disaster relief. The entire country was in the grips of the Great Depression and jobless men everywhere struggled to earn enough money to buy food for their families. For the country's youth, the situation was equally desperate.

Hundreds of thousands of young men from economically stricken households were unable to find work. Against this backdrop, Roosevelt outlined his concept for a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during his inaugural address on March 4, 1933. He proposed creating a new program aimed at conserving the nation's depleted natural resources and putting unemployed youth to work. The president told the American people: "Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources."<sup>2</sup>

Within a short time, CCC camps had been established across the country and young men were recruited to work on a myriad of conservation projects overseen by various federal agencies including the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). At the height of CCC enrollment in the summer of 1935, over a half-million men were scattered in 2,652 camps. Of all the New Deal programs instituted by Roosevelt to combat the economic hardships of the Great Depression, probably none was as popular and successful as the CCC.

Those familiar with the accomplishments of the CCC inevitably think of handsomely crafted rustic stone and log structures, walls, picnic shelters and other facilities within National Forests or National Parks. Indeed roughly 75 percent of all CCC camp enrollees worked on projects administered by the Department of Agriculture, the majority of them being on U.S. Forest Service lands. Almost all of the remaining camps were allotted to the Department of the Interior with the National Park Service (NPS) being the greatest beneficiary.

The association between the CCC and Reclamation (Reclamation), also within Interior, is far less well known. As the Federal agency responsible for designing and building large-scale irrigation projects in the western United States, Reclamation was vitally involved in the allocation and use of two natural resources, namely water and soils. Even though the number of Reclamation CCC camps was much smaller than that of other agencies, the program had a significant impact and assisted in furthering the goals of the agency during the devastating drought years of the 1930s. CCC assistance also afforded Reclamation the opportunity to expand on its primary mission of irrigation to develop recreational amenities at a number of its reservoirs.

### **Creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps**

By the close of Roosevelt's first month in office, Congress had acted upon the President's ambitious jobs-creation proposal and passed "An Act for the relief of unemployment through the performance of useful public works and other purposes." On March 31, 1933, the President signed the bill into law (Public No. 5, 73<sup>rd</sup> Congress) thus creating the CCC (initially called the Emergency Conservation Works or ECW).

With legislation in place, Roosevelt wasted no time in transposing his vision into action. In April 1933, he appointed Robert Fechner director of the CCC and established an advisory council comprised of representatives from the Departments of Labor, War, Interior and Agriculture. The purpose of the council was to coordinate oversight of the program and create a forum for discussing policy issues. The Department of Labor was assigned responsibility for recruiting youths and the War Department (Army) was in charge of enrollee administration, transportation, housing, food, clothing, supplies, medical care, education, discipline, and physical conditioning. The Departments of Agriculture and Interior had the task of locating the conservation work camps and supervising the actual work.

At the president's urging, the CCC enrolled its first 25,000 young men by April 6, 1933. The initial camp, appropriately called Roosevelt, was established on April 17 at George Washington National Forest near Luray, Virginia. Less than three months after the program's inauguration, about 300,000 men from throughout the country were settled in almost 1,500 camps. Each CCC installation typically housed about 200 men. According to Fechner, "it was the most rapid large scale mobilization of men the country had ever witnessed."<sup>3</sup>

Initial enrollment in the CCC was limited to unemployed single men between the ages of 18 and 25 who were U.S. citizens. For the most part these were discouraged men, unsuccessful in securing jobs because they had no work experience. They were described as "a weaponless army whose recruits came from broken homes, highway trails and relief shelters. . . "<sup>4</sup> American

Indians were at first not eligible but this restriction was soon lifted because of the dire conditions on many of the reservations.

Enrollment was also expanded to include “local experienced men” who served as technical foremen on work projects, and a limited number of World War I veterans. The latter were selected by the Veterans’ Administration and assigned to special camps operated less stringently than regular ones. Although racial discrimination was officially forbidden in accordance with the CCC legislation, blacks and other minorities did not escape prejudice within the program.<sup>5</sup> The number of blacks enrolled was limited and they were for the most part restricted to segregated camps.

### **Reclamation’s CCC Program**

Due to its role in planning and constructing irrigation projects throughout the arid and semi-arid West, Reclamation was vitally concerned with farmers’ welfare during the Depression.

Beginning in 1902, the Federal government had invested heavily in construction of dams and water conveyance facilities to provide farmers with essential water. Irrigators who benefitted from Reclamation facilities were required to repay their construction costs over a period of years. Operation and maintenance of irrigation systems were also supported by fees paid by the water users. By the mid-1930s, Reclamation had constructed a network of some fifty small and larger projects across the West.

The combined effect of drought and poor agricultural practices exacted a terrible toll on Western farmers during the Depression. Crop prices were low, water supplies had dwindled, and valuable

top soil was swept off of fields in blinding dust storms. The financial hardships faced by farmers meant that irrigation systems were not adequately maintained. Many aging water control structures had deteriorated beyond repair, canals were silted and clogged with vegetation, weeds and gophers infested canal banks, and crop yields dropped drastically with the decrease in water supplies. By 1934, it had become critical for the Federal government to address the plight of western farmers and to safeguard its hefty investment in irrigation projects. The CCC program provided a perfect mechanism for doing both while meeting its objectives of protecting natural resources and aiding unemployment.

The first CCC camp to open on a Reclamation project was established in May 1934 at Lake Guernsey, a reservoir of the North Platte Project, in Wyoming. Designated originally as RS-1 (Reclamation Service No. 1), the camp became known as BR-9. It was obtained under a cooperative agreement with the NPS and along with BR-10, established in July 1934, was responsible for transforming the reservoir shores into a showplace of recreational development. Sturdy log and stone picnic shelters, trails, and a handsome rustic-style museum complete with interpretive displays were built by CCC enrollees. The outstanding significance of their contributions at Lake Guernsey resulted in the designation of Lake Guernsey State Park as a National Historic Landmark on September 25, 1997.

In early September 1934, a second camp was established on a cooperative basis with the NPS at Elephant Butte Reservoir on the Rio Grande Project in New Mexico. Designated BR-8, the camp enrollees, along with those from BR-54 occupied in August 1935, greatly improved the

recreational facilities at the reservoir. They also transformed the landscape by building a variety of structures, terracing the hillsides, and planting hundreds of trees. The CCC component is a major feature of the Elephant Butte National Register Historic District, listed in the National Register in February 1997.

In July 1934, six drought-relief camps were also assigned to Reclamation. These were essentially the same as regular CCC camps but were restricted to states suffering severely under the drought and were authorized for one year, rather than the normal six months. Additionally, they were financed under different appropriations.<sup>6</sup> Assigned numbers beginning with DBR (Drought Relief Bureau of Reclamation), the six camps were DBR-1 at Lake Minatare, Nebraska on the North Platte Project; DBR-2 at Fruitdale, South Dakota on the Belle Fourche Project; DBR-3 at Carlsbad, New Mexico on the Carlsbad Project; DBR-4 at Ysleta, Texas on the Rio Grande Project; DBR-5 at Heber, Utah on the Strawberry Valley Project; and DBR-6 at Ephraim, Utah on the Sanpete Project. The improvements completed on Reclamation irrigation projects by the drought-relief camps were of tremendous value in combating the acute water shortages plaguing farmers. The camp at Lake Minatare can also be credited with construction of a unique Reclamation CCC edifice that still exists: On a point of land extending into the lake, the enrollees built a fifty-five-foot-high native rock “lighthouse” containing a circular staircase. From the observation deck at the top can be seen Scotts Bluff and Chimney Rock, both landmarks of the Oregon Trail.

Initially, work accomplished at Reclamation CCC camps focused on rehabilitating the storage,



distribution and drainage systems of older projects that had been seriously affected by the combination of drought and depressed farm prices. Efforts consisted of returning weed- and silt-filled canals and laterals to a proper cross section; replacing decaying wood structures with concrete; adding new water control structures; building bridges over canals; eradicating weeds and rodents; reconditioning operating roads; placing riprap on canal and lateral banks, and sealing porous canal with earth or concrete linings. Much of the work accomplished was of a seemingly mundane and unspectacular nature but it had far-reaching benefits.

As Reclamation's CCC program expanded from its small beginnings in 1934, the types of project work undertaken by the enrollees grew more varied and broadened to include developing supplemental water supplies and constructing new irrigation projects. The acute water deficiencies experienced during the Depression indicated that a few of the project storage facilities, though adequate under ordinary conditions, were insufficient during drought periods. To remedy this situation, CCC forces were used to build supplemental storage facilities. Examples are Midview Dam and dike on the Moon Lake Project in Utah (BR-11) and Anita Dam on the Huntley Project in Montana (BR-57). Clearing reservoir areas of timber and debris in preparation for new dam construction was another labor intensive task assigned to the enrollees at various camps. The physically demanding work involved felling trees, piling and then burning them. Utilizing heavy equipment such as tractors and bulldozers provided the enrollees an opportunity to learn new skills. The most prominent of this type of work was accomplished at the Shasta Dam site on the Central Valley Project. Enrollees of BR-84 and 85 cleared 2,597 acres in the reservoir area during the camps' existence. Similar work was undertaken at Wickiup

Reservoir on the Deschutes Project (BR-75, 76, & 77), Deer Creek Reservoir on the Provo River Project (BR-91), Pine View Reservoir on the Ogden River Project (BR-12), Island Park Reservoir on the Upper Snake River Project (BR-28) and Parker Dam Reservoir on the Parker Dam Project (BR-17, 18).

Building new feeder canals to bring additional water to existing reservoirs was another effort to increase water supplies. Examples include the Duchesne Feeder Canal on the Moon Lake Project (BR-11) and the Strawberry Reservoir Feeder Canal on the Strawberry Valley Project (BR-5). Enrollees cleared the canal right-of-ways, excavated the trenches, trimmed the canal slopes, and, in some cases, poured concrete linings. The CCC also completed improvements to numerous existing storage facilities such as Orman Dam on the Belle Fourche Project (BR-2), Clear Lake Dam on the Klamath Project (BR-41), Moon Lake Dam on the Moon Lake Project (BR-11) and the South Diversion Dam on the Orland Project (BR-78).

Another type of work undertaken by the CCC was flood control. Many areas of the West under Reclamation projects were subject to intense localized rainfalls of short duration that had caused severe damage to irrigation systems. The CCC built a number of flood control structures such as Apache and Box Canyon Dams on the Rio Grande Project (BR-39).

As noted earlier, one of the most visible contributions of the CCC enrollees assigned to Reclamation projects were the recreational improvements completed. Several of the projects had lands adjacent to rivers, reservoirs, or lakes, which were ideally suited for use as parks,

campgrounds or picnic areas. Some of these lands were developed by the CCC through construction of tables, benches, stoves, fireplaces, water systems, latrines, sewage disposal plants, and landscaping. Swimming, boating, and fishing facilities, and hiking trails built by the CCC provided park visitors with additional amenities. The improvements greatly enhanced public appreciation for the CCC and made Reclamation projects more accessible. The prime examples of recreational development occurred at Elephant Butte Dam on the Rio Grande Project (BR-8 and 54), at Guernsey Lake on the North Platte Project (BR-9 and 10), and at Lake Walcott on the Minidoka Project (BR-27).

Auxiliary to these main classes of work, the CCC enrollees were engaged in improvements to wildlife refuges at reservoirs, rodent control operations, weed eradication experiments and emergency work. In cooperation with the Bureau of Biological Survey (now the Fish and Wildlife Service), Reclamation's CCC enrollees developed wildlife refuges at the Deer Flat Reservoir in western Idaho (BR-24), Tullake Wildlife Refuge in northern California (BR-20), at Lake Walcott, in southern Idaho (BR-27), and at the Pishkun Reservoir in Montana (BR-33). At Elephant Butte Reservoir, CCC forces constructed a 14-pond fish hatchery (BR-8 and 54).

The elimination of troublesome rodents along canal banks and in farm fields was an ongoing endeavor at many camps and was viewed as an "undertaking of major importance to many Reclamation projects."<sup>7</sup> Damage caused by rodents was twofold: in canal banks their burrowing resulted in canal collapses and in fields their activities resulted in substantial crop loss. Pocket gophers and ground squirrels were the primary targets and, in cooperation with the Biological

Survey, eradication was accomplished either by trapping or poisoning or both. The work was well suited to the CCC program because it was labor intensive. Small crews performed the task as an adjunct to larger construction projects. By June 1941, 2,510,100 acres had been treated for rodent control.

Weed eradication was another activity performed at many Reclamation CCC camps. The presence of noxious weeds, such as Canadian thistle, bindweed, and Johnson grass, was increasing on Reclamation projects and the available labor of CCC recruits was applied towards eliminating this menace. Canals provided easy transportation routes for seeds to all parts of the irrigated lands, and controlling and eradicating weeds was a complex problem. Enrollees did not enter on private property to conduct weed control but the farmers were shown, by demonstration on government tracts, the methods of attacking various kinds of invasive plants. Sample demonstrations were also performed on the Government canals and laterals for the benefit of the operating personnel. Experiments with different types of grasses that could crowd out weeds on canal banks and that might be useful as a pasture crop were undertaken.<sup>8</sup> On the Belle Fourche Project (BR-2), CCC enrollees demonstrated to farmers the use and methods of growing strawberry clover and brome grass as valuable pasture. Experiments to eradicate noxious weeds using blades and chemicals were carried on at test plots. On the Rio Grande Project (BR-4), considerable effort was expended on that objective. Different methods tried for the control of bindweed included chopping plants out by hand, spraying them with oil, and then burning them.

While the CCC program received a lot of attention for its role in fighting forest fires and

assisting in flood disasters, emergency work conducted by CCC enrollees on Reclamation projects attracted little recognition in spite of its great value. The most common emergencies were canal breaks usually resulting from the tunneling activities of rodents. Such breaks, if not repaired promptly, had the potential to cause serious damage by flooding some fields and drying up others. A 1937 Reclamation Era article described various emergencies that had been attended to by CCC enrollees. On the Klamath Project in California and Oregon (BR-20 and 41), 10 recent breaks in canal banks had been repaired. On the Salt River Project in Arizona (BR-14 and 19), a serious break in the South Canal occurred in April 1937 and was tended to by enrollees. Early in May 1937, CCC men from the Deaver Camp on the Shoshone Project (BR-7) were called out to help reconstruct 300 feet of the inclined drop below the Ralston Reservoir.

The hazards of winter created numerous emergencies where the help of the CCC was invaluable. The snow season of 1936-37 was particularly severe in parts of Utah and Nevada and the CCC youths effectively carried out emergency work to save human lives and livestock. In January 1937, about 50,000 head of sheep were marooned by heavy snows in Pleasant Valley in the Uintah Basin of eastern Utah. A CCC tractor, with a bulldozer attachment, was loaned to the Utah State Road Commission to open a 26-mile road on which to lead the animals out. CCC enrollees from BR-11 on the Moon Lake Project accompanied the tractor to perform any unexpected repairs. Mining and farming districts in western Nevada were particularly hard hit by snow storms in early February 1937. CCC men and equipment were made available for rescue work. In cooperation with the county, they cleared 380 miles of road, dug out 10 towns and outlying ranchers and miners, and permitted feed to be hauled to many isolated cattle herds.

All CCC men at Carlsbad, New Mexico (BR-3) were called out in early June 1937 to perform emergency flood protection work at McMillan Dam brought about by extreme flood conditions of the Pecos River. A leak caused by the high waters was discovered at the dam on May 31 and for the next 6 days, CCC crews placed sandbags on the reservoir face of the dam to hold back water from any leaks that might occur. The superb efforts of the CCC enrollees were praised. When a small dam failed on June 13, 1937, near Austin, Colorado and partially flooded the town, CCC forces from the camp in Montrose (BR-23) were brought in to help restore sanitation facilities and repair damaged irrigation ditches.

At the height of the CCC program in the summer of 1935, there were forty-six camps operating on Reclamation projects throughout the West. In addition to and association with the main camps, side camps also known as spike camps, were sometimes established. These were usually smaller and made up of tents that could easily be dismantled. Typically, camp structures were standard plan, simple frame buildings. Side camps were created when a job was at such a distance from the main camp that it made sense to station a work force in closer proximity. Examples of side camps on Reclamation CCC projects were the ones at Alamogordo Dam (BR-3, main camp) where enrollees constructed improvements for recreational use of the reservoir; on the Hyrum Project (BR-12, main camp) where enrollees constructed a diversion dam on the Little Bear River and built a parapet and curb walls on the Hyrum Dam; and at the river portal to the Gunnison Tunnel (BR-23, main camp) where enrollees worked on widening and reconstructing the old road leading from the top of the canyon down to the portal.

Some CCC camps established on Reclamation projects were seasonal for climatic reasons. Those at high elevations, such as BR-5 on the Strawberry Valley Project, were summer camps and enrollees were relocated to lower elevations in the winter (BR-11). BR-50 on the Yakima Project was only occupied during the summer because of heavy winter snows and severe weather. Due to the intense summer heat in Yuma, Arizona, enrollees of BR-13 and BR-74 did not occupy the camps during that season for the first few years. The two Salt River Project camps in the Phoenix area, BR-14 and 19, operated similarly.

### **Job Training in Reclamation CCC Camps**

When CCC camps were assigned to Reclamation, the agency assumed responsibility for supervising and training the enrollees while they were engaged in project work. The latter was scheduled for five days a week, eight hours a day except in the event of emergencies. Oversight of work activities was carried out by Reclamation field engineers and by project superintendents in charge of the Reclamation projects on which the camps were located. The field engineers directed surveys, inspections, and other field engineering work. They also supervised and approved the construction of the various physical features. The CCC project superintendents, also designated by Reclamation as CCC Regional Directors, had immediate charge of the work activities and directed the CCC supervisory, facilitating, and enrolled personnel in carrying out the work.

During the lifespan of the CCC, Reclamation dedicated an increasing amount of attention to the job-training aspects of the CCC program. Even before a national requirement for 10 hours of

weekly general education or vocational training was instituted in June 1937 by CCC headquarters in Washington D.C., Reclamation recognized the valuable skills that enrollees were developing on the job. Constructing canals, roads, dams, and water control features as well as building recreational facilities afforded enrollees a perfect opportunity to gain practical experience. Building concrete structures involved teaching the young men the fundamentals of earth excavation, form building, reinforcement, concrete mixing, concrete finishing, and curing concrete. Other training included working with rock, both in quarrying and the construction of masonry walls, the use of burners and chemicals for weed control, and the shaping of lumber for timber structures. Enrollees became expert at operating all types of heavy equipment such as tractors, trucks, and draglines. In addition to acquiring construction skills, enrollees at Reclamation camps participated in the cooking and clerical operations of the camps.<sup>9</sup>

The opportunity to attend classes in the evening was another component of the educational experience offered at CCC camps. Some of the young men enrolled in nearby schools to further their knowledge. With the increased emphasis on education starting in June 1937, Reclamation expanded its own classroom programs. During the day, foremen were assigned to supervise and explain to enrollees the proper method to do their assigned tasks. One or two evenings a week, the foremen held classes in camp to supplement the practical work with related training. For example, an enrollee whose duty it was to refuel tractors with diesel fuel might learn the essential difference between diesel fuel and gasoline. A standard CCC truck driver's course taught truck drivers how to reduce the cost of vehicle maintenance, to be more efficient operators and to be safety conscious. Visual aids such as miniature models, and motion pictures were often used to



enhance the classroom instruction. Foremen attended leadership courses to learn effective teaching methods. Regular Reclamation employees assisted by teaching technical subjects and clerical skills such as property accountability and cost-keeping. Courses mentioned in some of the camp reports include spelling, blueprint reading, bee culture, warehousing, and shorthand.<sup>10</sup>

All sorts of training materials were also available through the CCC education office in Washington. Handbooks containing lists of available films and manuals were sent out to the camps. Manuals ranged in subject from “Brick and Stone Work” to “Common Range Plants” to “Signs and Markers” to “Job Training is a Business Proposition.” All camps had libraries supplied with textbooks, reference works, and a selection of daily newspapers. Books useful for on-the-job training as well as for advancing personal skills were available. Titles ran the gamut from “Accountancy as a Career” to “Electricity in the Home and on the Farm” to “Elements of Forestry” to “Amateur Machinist.”

Towards the end of the CCC program, Reclamation directed all of its camps to furnish new enrollees with a series of publications intended to familiarize them with the agency and its role in conserving resources. The list included Reclamation Home Creating--Wealth Producing--Self Sustaining , Grand Coulee Dam, Boulder Dam, and the Central Valley Project. Reclamation had plans to prepare its own pamphlet on the agency’s CCC program but it is unknown whether this ever occurred.

The training and education paid off for Reclamation’s CCC enrollees. In February 1937, it was

reported that CCC men from Reclamation camps had been successful in securing a range of jobs upon leaving the Corps. These included farmer, farm hand, ranch hand, miner, railroad worker, skilled labor helper, lumber jack, highway worker, factory worker, and painter among others. Much of the success of the enrollees was attributed to the experience gained while in the CCC camps. Records indicated that enrollees who served at least a year or longer in the CCC ended up with higher paying jobs than those who served for just six months. Enrollees who were offered positions while in the Corps were honorably discharged to start their employment. It was found that the young men leaving the CCC to accept jobs usually returned to their home state or region. Eastern boys assigned to western camps nearly all returned to the East and western youths preferred to stay in the West. Even before leaving the CCC, individuals who performed outstanding work had opportunities for advancement. They were promoted to responsible positions as foremen on the technical supervisory staff at the camps when vacancies occurred.

From information included in Reclamation's CCC regular camp reports and in journal articles, it appears that the training offered to enrollees was well-received by them. In fact, with few exceptions the morale of the enrollees was noted as good. For example, at BR-5 on the Strawberry Valley Project, the "enrollees exhibited a fine cooperative spirit and high morale" despite the remote locality of the camp. At BR-20 on the Klamath Project, the enrollees were praised for their hard work in the camp's first annual report: "The manner in which the men in both camps (BR-41 as well) applied their efforts was truly remarkable, and it was not long before the camps became well established and the work program began to show signs of progress... The men wanted to work, to prove their worth and better themselves, when given the opportunity.

Moreover, they proved this when offered the facilities of the buildings and teaching personnel at the Merrill and Tulelake high schools for evenings.”

In addition to the emphasis on developing “strong minds”, CCC camps also promoted building “strong, healthy bodies.” Physical conditioning, in addition to educational training, was considered important for character improvement and for maintaining good camp morale. Planned athletic and recreational activities were part of all camp schedules. Enrollees participated in sports such as baseball, basketball, swimming, ping pong or tennis. Many camps also offered regular recreational outings to nearby towns and attractions.

A number of the camps produced their own newsletters in which upcoming activities were announced or the results of sports competitions were reported. The newsletters provide a more personal view of daily life at the camps. A column in the October 1937 “Stanfield Echo” (BR-44) advised new enrollees on proper behavior. Among the twenty items listed were the following: Be careful of the type of language you use around camp and in public; Do not smoke or flip cigarettes, or talk after the lights are out; The wasting of food is considered serious misconduct and will be punished accordingly; and Watch your actions while you are in town, you will be judged accordingly.

Although Reclamation’s CCC program was not without its critics, overall it appears to have been viewed as very beneficial by the public. Their initial concerns about having unemployed youths living nearby dissipated over time. Annual open houses at the camps gave outsiders a perfect

opportunity to learn of the accomplishments of the enrollees and to better understand the program. Camps participated in numerous local events such as parades and county fairs. Reclamation even produced a film in 1937 entitled “Reclamation and the CCC” which showed enrollees engaged at work on a number of projects. Unfortunately, no copy of the film has been located.

Strong community support is evidenced in newspaper articles published in early 1938 when President Roosevelt contemplated closing all Reclamation camps in response to the criticism that they benefitted private irrigators rather than the interests of the public. In Wyoming, the *Powell Tribune* wrote:

“As to the CCC in reclamation work, we have regarded the camp at Deaver as of great benefit to the general farming community there. . . We need more CCC camps and fewer jails; we need more CCC camps and less unemployment; we need more CCC camps for the improvement in mind, morals and body of the boys themselves--that is more important and more of value to us all than the work they do.”<sup>11</sup>

In February 1938, to counter the accusations lodged against it, Reclamation restricted CCC activities to Federally owned lands and the government had to have a direct financial interest in all work performed, or it had to be developing recreational facilities for public benefit.

### **Termination of Reclamation CCC Camps**

The outbreak of World War II brought an end to the CCC. As the United States geared up the production of arms and ammunition, the unemployment problem dissolved. The number of CCC camps nationwide dwindled from a peak of 2,652 in the summer of 1935 to 1,500 by April 1939. With the attack on Pearl Harbor, the country's attention was riveted on a new front. Some six weeks after the bombing, on January 27, 1942, CCC director James L. McEntee announced the immediate reorganization of the CCC on a war basis. He directed the termination of all CCC camps as quickly as possible unless they were involved in war-related construction activities or in the protection of war-related natural resources.

Reclamation justified its continued need for CCC camps during the war on the basis of the urgent need for a reliable and adequate food supply. The effect of the war on Reclamation's CCC program was thus described: "The defense program and later the all-out war program emphasized the responsibility of the Nation's food growers, and a portion of that responsibility was thus imparted to the camps helping in this work. Meeting the needs of the armed services and industry, the bureau's camps provided one of the sources of supply for trained construction equipment operators. All phases of the training program were emphasized and especially those skills which could augment the supply of needed trained workers"<sup>12</sup>

During the last full fiscal year of the CCC program, 1942, there was a reduction in the number of camps assigned to Reclamation from 43 camps on July 1, 1941, to 7 camps on June 30, 1942. In general, the CCC work activities previously initiated were continued through fiscal year 1942, with impetus added by the war. In planning for the annual CCC "open house" celebrations in

1941, a memo was sent out from Reclamation Commissioner John Page to all CCC field offices urging them to highlight activities contributing the most to the national defense program. Page quoted from a letter that the Director of the CCC had sent out: "It should be emphasized that the entire pattern of camp life--the daily routine, the training and educational programs, the work projects--all contribute to national security by developing in youth character, discipline, good work habits, health, love of country and the ability to achieve economic independence."<sup>13</sup>

Eight new camps were assigned to Reclamation at the beginning of Fiscal Year 1942. They were established for the purpose of constructing small water conservation and utilization projects (BR-93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99, 101, 102). Sometimes referred to as Wheeler-Case Projects, they were confined to the Great Plains and other western areas subject to drought and water shortages. As one of several agencies participating in the program, Reclamation's role was to construct irrigation facilities to help meet local water needs. By the end of the year, considerable progress had been made.

Although President Roosevelt urged continuance of the CCC as a means of accomplishing critical defense work, Congress sealed the fate of the program on June 30, 1942, when it voted to liquidate the CCC and allocated \$8 million to help cover closing costs. Steps were immediately taken to release the remaining 60,000 enrollees and to discontinue all work programs.

Reclamation's remaining camps were shut down the following month. Some of Reclamation's terminated camps were transferred to the Army or Navy for military use. In a number of cases, closed CCC camps were used to house conscientious objectors (BR-75,76,77,93, 95,97, 99), war

prisoners (BR-39) or Japanese evacuees (BR-42). Where no future uses could be contemplated, camp structures were relocated or demolished.

## **Conclusion**

During the life of the CCC program, Reclamation operated camps at 83 separate locations on 45 Reclamation projects in 15 western states. Even though the agency was but a minor recipient of CCC benefits (in April 1937 Reclamation was assigned 34 camps which represented only 1.7 percent of the total number), Reclamation continually touted the positive results attained by the enrollees. The assignment of CCC camps to Reclamation occurred at a time when western agriculture was in critical straits. Work completed by the enrollees helped revitalize an array of existing irrigation projects and brought new water to other areas.

A few figures illustrate the impressive volume of accomplishments of CCC forces on Reclamation facilities: over 60,000,000 square yards of canals and drainage ditches were cleaned or cleared; 1,800,000 square yards of canal were lined with impervious material and 2,800,000 square yards were riprapped for protection against erosion; 3,000 miles of operating roads had been constructed along canal banks; 39,000 acres of reservoir sites were cleared of brush and trees; and 15,800 water control structures had been built. The contributions of the CCC were summarized in Reclamation's final report on the program as follows: "The fine work of the Civilian Conservation Corps by 1942 had brought the Federal irrigation projects back to a high<sup>7</sup> standard of physical excellence. The irrigation systems are now in generally good condition, able to deliver required amounts of water and by the permanency of their rehabilitation they are

insured against interruptions of consequence. “<sup>14</sup>

For the enrollees at Reclamation camps, the experience provided invaluable skills, training, and opened new doors for a more promising future. The CCC offered an opportunity “To learn in the great outdoors--how to work, how to live, and how to get ahead.”<sup>15</sup>

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“Civilian Conservation Corps Accomplishments on Federal Reclamation Projects.” by Alfred Golze. Reclamation Era. September 1938, p. 192.

“Civilian Conservation Corps Work on Reclamation Projects.” by Dr. H.T. Cory. Reclamation Era. January 1935, p.22.

Congressional Record. February 2, 1939, article located at National Archives, Denver (RG 115, Entry 28, Box 1)

Department of Agriculture. U.S. Forest Service. The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933-42. By Alison T. Otis et al. August 1986.

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Federal Security Agency. Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Fiscal Year Ended June 30 1942. National Archives, Denver (RG 115, Entry 22, Box 47).



“Job Training in the Reclamation CCC Camps.” by Ralph Sullivan. Reclamation Era. July 1939, pp. 184-86.

Haskin, Frederic. “Praises Record of C.C.C. Camp” The Sunday Washington Star. August 11, 1940.

Memo from Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation to All CCC Field Offices, February 24, 1941. National Archives, Denver, RG 115, Entry 22, Box 1.

Objectives and Results of the Civilian Conservation Corps Program by Robert Fechner, 1938, National Archives, Denver (RG 115, Entry 22, Box 35, file 035)

“Operation and Maintenance of CCC Equipment on Reclamation Projects-Its Relation to National Defense.” By Alfred Golze. Reclamation Era. April 1941, p. 118.

“Reclamation Work Trains CCC Men” by Alfred Golze. Reclamation Era. February 1937, p. 38-39.

“Reclamation Trains the CCC Enrollee.” by Alfred Golze. Reclamation Era. March 1939, pp. 62-64.

Salmond, John A. The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1967.

“Write Congressmen About This.” Powell Tribune. January 20, 1938. A copy of this newspaper article is located at the National Archives, Denver (RG 115, Entry 22, Box 34)

In addition to the articles in Reclamation Era, the best source of information on Reclamation’s CCC camps are the records located at the National Archives, Rocky Mountain Region, in Denver. Reclamation’s CCC records can be found in RG 115 under Entries 7, 21, and 22. Information can also be found in Reclamation’s project histories located at the National Archives in RG 115, Entry 10.

### **Endnotes**

1. Portions of this paper are excerpted from “*Happy Days of the Depression: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Colorado*” that appeared in Colorado Heritage in Spring, 2001.

2. Objectives and Results of the Civilian Conservation Corps Program by Robert Fechner, 1938, National Archives, Denver (RG 115, Entry 22, Box 35, file 035)

3. Objectives and Results of the Civilian Conservation Corps Program. P. 7.

4. Haskin, Frederic. “Praises Record of C.C.C. Camp” The Sunday Washington Star. August 11, 1940.

5. Of three amendments to the bill signed by Roosevelt on March 31, 1933, one was submitted by Representative Oscar De Priest, Republican of Illinois, and the only Black Congressman. It prohibited discrimination on account of race, color, or creed. (Salmond, John. P. 23)
6. "Civilian Conservation Corps Work on Reclamation Projects." by Dr. H.T. Cory. Reclamation Era. January 1936, p.22.
7. "CCC Accomplishments on Reclamation Projects." by Alfred Golze. Reclamation Era. January 1937, p. 26.
8. "Civilian Conservation Corps Accomplishments on Federal Reclamation Projects." by Alfred Golze. Reclamation Era. September 1938, p. 192.
9. "Reclamation Work Trains CCC Men" by Alfred Golze. Reclamation Era. February 1937, p. 38-39.
10. "CCC Accomplishments on Federal Reclamation Projects, Fiscal Year 1940." by Alfred Golze. Reclamation Era. November 1940, p. 318.
11. "Write Congressmen About This." Powell Tribune. January 20, 1938. A copy of this newspaper article as well as the other ones mentioned are located at the National Archives, Denver (RG 115, Entry 22, Box 34)
12. Federal Security Agency. Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Fiscal Year Ended June 30 1942. p. 40.
13. Memo from Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation to All CCC Field Offices, February 24, 1941. National Archives, Denver, RG 115, Entry 22, Box 1.
14. "Final Report, Civilian Conservation Corps Activities, Bureau of Reclamation."
15. Article from Congressional Record. February 2, 1939, National Archives, Denver (RG 115, Entry 28, Box 1)